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10TH DISTRICT, VIRGINIA



241 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-4610
(202) 225-5136

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

January 17, 2012

13873 PARK CENTER ROAD
SUITE 130
HERNDON, VA 20171
(703) 709-5800
(800) 945-9663 (IN STATE)

110 NORTH CAMERON STREET
WINCHESTER, VA 22601
(540) 667-0990
(800) 850-3463 (IN STATE)

wolf.house.gov

The Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon Room 3E 880
Washington DC 20301

Dear Secretary Panetta 

As I am sure you are aware, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012 contains language providing your office with \$1 million to assemble the Afghanistan/Pakistan (Af/Pak) Study Group. I request that you do so immediately.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported last week (article enclosed) that the most recent National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) paints a very bleak picture of the war in Afghanistan and the future of U.S. operations in that region. It reflects concerns that I have expressed in numerous letters to you over time, especially the importance of understanding Afghan tribal and political structures and the Pakistani military and intelligence services actively cooperating with two of the most deadly terror networks in the region.

Given this stark assessment from our own intelligence community, the need to create the Af/Pak Study Group is clear. The Af/Pak Study Group's analysis and recommendations could bring needed clarity to current and future U.S. military and diplomatic operations. You supported the Iraq Study Group and lent your considerable expertise to that effort, so I am perplexed as to why you do not similarly support the Af/Pak Study Group.

Your November 3, 2011, letter to me stated that coalition troops are making progress against the Taliban and other militants and that progress is being made on our relationship with the Pakistani government and military. I have enormous respect for the men and women serving our country in South Asia and acknowledge that our troops are performing their mission with bravery and resolve, however, the NIE appears to contradict your assessment.

Also enclosed is an article by the Hudson Institute's Nina Shea discusses how Hussain Haqqani, the former Pakistani Ambassador to the United States is facing possible charges of treason for his alleged involvement in "Memogate." Shea asserts, "There is every reason to believe that the real reason Haqqani is being targeted is that he is a prominent moderate Muslim, one of the few remaining in Pakistan's government." Shea goes on to point out that Haqqani was personal friends with two men, Punjab governor Salman Taseer and Pakistan's Federal Minister of Minority Affairs Shabbaz Bhatti, whose lives were cut tragically short last year as a result of their outspoken critique of Pakistan's draconian blasphemy laws.

The Honorable Leon Panetta

January 17, 2012

Page 2

Increasingly we see a trend in Pakistan of moderating voices being marginalized and altogether silenced. While I appreciate that you are "working hard with Pakistan to improve the level of cooperation" so that terrorist and militant groups no longer find safe haven in the country - I am afraid the complexity of the evolving situation in Pakistan necessitates more.

The NIE's assessment could lead to support for the war in Afghanistan eroding among the American people and I feel the same sentiment will soon permeate the halls of Congress. If the president has simply decided that U.S. involvement will end in 2014 and that no further U.S. strategy is needed, he should clearly state that this is his policy and be forthcoming with the American people. If President Obama has not made a final determination on U.S. strategy going forward, I ask again, what harm can come from a group of independent experts using their experience to offer solutions for long-term success?

Following 9/11, I have supported U.S. military actions in the War on Terror. I want to see our soldiers, diplomats and Foreign Service personnel return home with their heads held high, knowing they all played a crucial role in establishing stability in South Asia where countries no longer pose a threat to our national security. I firmly believe that you can help ensure this happens by using the money made available to you to create the Af/Pak Study Group. Establishing this panel quickly will show the American people that the Obama Administration is willing to consider all possible options to achieve success in this volatile region.

I urge you to take these steps immediately before support for our mission in Afghanistan further erodes.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

FRW:cw

latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-intel-afghan-20120112,0,3639052.story

latimes.com

U.S. intelligence report on Afghanistan sees stalemate

The sobering judgments in a classified National Intelligence Estimate appear at odds with recent optimistic statements about the war by Pentagon officials.

By Ken Dilanian and David S. Cloud, Los Angeles Times

6:39 PM PST, January 11, 2012

Reporting from Washington

The U.S. intelligence community says in a secret new assessment that the war in Afghanistan is mired in stalemate, and warns that security gains from an increase in American troops have been undercut by pervasive corruption, incompetent governance and Taliban fighters operating from neighboring Pakistan, according to U.S. officials.

The sobering judgments, laid out in a classified National Intelligence Estimate completed last month and delivered to the White House, appeared at odds with recent optimistic statements by Pentagon officials and have deepened divisions between U.S. intelligence agencies and American military commanders about progress in the decade-old war.

The detailed document, known as an NIE, runs more than 100 pages and represents the consensus view of the CIA and 15 other U.S. intelligence agencies. Similar in tone to an NIE prepared a year ago, it challenges the Pentagon's claim to have achieved lasting security gains in Taliban strongholds in southern Afghanistan, according to U.S. officials who have read or been briefed on its contents.

PHOTOS: A decade of conflict in Afghanistan

In a section looking at future scenarios, the NIE also asserts that the Afghan government in Kabul may not be able to survive as the U.S. steadily pulls out its troops and reduces military and civilian assistance.

"Its viability is tenuous," said one official, citing the report.

Although the review gives the U.S. military and its allies credit for driving the Taliban out of some areas last year, it says the gains were not enough to bolster the weak central government in Kabul, haven't diminished the Taliban's will to keep fighting, and haven't instilled confidence among Afghans in much of the country.

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As a result, the NIE warns that the overall difficulties could jeopardize the Obama administration's plans to withdraw most U.S. troops and hand over responsibility for the war to the Afghan government by 2014.

The findings prompted a sharp response from Marine Corps Gen. John Allen, the U.S. commander of Western forces in the war, and Ryan Crocker, the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, who filed their objections in a one-page written dissent. The comment was also signed by Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis, commander of Central Command, and Adm. James Stavridis, supreme allied commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Military and Pentagon officials argued that assumptions used by intelligence agencies were flawed.

"It assumes a quicker drawdown of U.S. support to the Afghan government than a lot of people are projecting," said one U.S. official familiar with Pentagon thinking, speaking of the assessment.

Military officials also cited what they claim are gaps in the intelligence agencies' understanding of the Taliban leadership's thinking, the officials said.

Some in Congress and the Obama administration are concerned that the bleak assessment suggests little progress was made in the last year. During that time, the U.S. has suffered more than 400 military fatalities and spent more than \$100 billion. As of Wednesday, 1,873 Americans had been killed in Afghanistan since U.S. forces invaded in late 2001, according to the website icasualties.org.

Army Gen. David H. Petraeus wrote a dissent to last year's NIE when he was U.S. commander in the war. He is now CIA director, and he pledged during his Senate confirmation hearings not to allow his personal views as a former commander to color the CIA's analysis.

The recent NIE agrees with the military that Afghan Taliban fighters have found safe haven in Pakistan's tribal areas. After a six-week lull, CIA drone strikes resumed this week in North Waziristan, reportedly killing four people Wednesday, but U.S. officials warned that drone strikes alone cannot prevent Afghan insurgents from regrouping there.

"It's all about the safe haven," one congressional official said. "That has to be solved."

Military officials have acknowledged that there are no easy answers, and that a peace deal may be the only solution.

The Taliban has suffered heavy losses, particularly in southern Afghanistan, but it also has gained ground in the country's east, near Pakistan, according to officials briefed on the NIE. But the intelligence community is not convinced that military gains in the south can be maintained once large numbers of U.S. forces withdraw.

The Afghan army and in particular the police face enormous problems contending with the insurgency as U.S. assistance declines, the document concludes. But it also raises doubts about whether Afghan civilian ministries can govern successfully in the south and other areas.

In late 2009, President Obama agreed to deploy 33,000 additional troops to Afghanistan, and the total U.S.

force in the country peaked at about 100,000 last summer. The U.S. now has 91,000 troops there, and all combat forces are scheduled to withdraw by 2014.

Pentagon planners assume that a residual force will remain to train and assist the Afghans, but the White House has yet to sign off on that. The Obama administration is negotiating a long-term military alliance with the government of Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Pentagon officials insist that the troop increase has put the Taliban on its heels.

"We're moving in the right direction and we're winning this very tough conflict," Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta told troops on Dec. 14 at Forward Operating Base Sharana in the eastern province of Paktika.

Pentagon spokesman George Little said Wednesday that Panetta continues to believe there has been "substantial progress." The key, he said, is "to strengthen Afghan security forces and to build toward a long-term relationship with Afghanistan."

National intelligence estimates often carry significant weight in U.S. policy circles, although they are hardly immune from errors.

Most famously, the 2002 NIE on Iraq judged with high confidence that Saddam Hussein was secretly amassing chemical and biological weapons, and trying to build a nuclear bomb. The George W. Bush administration repeatedly cited that NIE before the 2003 invasion of Iraq, but it ultimately was proved inaccurate in almost every respect.

Although they declined to discuss the contents of the current NIE, some members of Congress with access to intelligence said they are concerned about the lack of progress in Afghanistan.

"I think there are real problems," said Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), who chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee. "There have been gains in security ... but the Taliban is still a force to be reckoned with. They still occupy considerable land in the country."

Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), a member of the House Intelligence Committee, said the Obama administration should release an unclassified version of the NIE for public debate.

"I do think it would be very helpful to release an unclassified version," she said. "Given the expense and the lives that are at stake, the American people should see some of the top-line conclusions of the NIE."

PHOTOS: A decade of conflict in Afghanistan

ken.dilanian@latimes.com

david.cloud@latimes.com

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The Corner

The one and only.

Defend Threatened Muslim Moderates: Save Husain Haqqani

By Nina Shea

January 12, 2012 6:26 P.M.

Husain Haqqani may soon be put on trial for his life in his native Pakistan. That country's ambassador to the United States until last November, he now faces allegations of treason in the so-called "Memogate" affair, accused of instigating an unsigned memo to the U.S. government warning of a military-coup plot against Pakistan's government — an allegation he denies. Haqqani's defense lawyer, the valiant human-rights advocate Asma Jahangir, has filed an appeal to the Supreme Court challenging due-process irregularities in a preliminary investigation against him, and, fearing assassination from vigilantes, the ambassador has sought safety in the prime minister's home, where he is a virtual prisoner.

There is every reason to believe that the real reason Haqqani is being targeted is that he is a prominent moderate Muslim, one of the few remaining in Pakistan's government. Farahnaz Ispahani, Haqqani's wife and a member of Pakistan's parliament, wrote in the *Washington Post* on January 10 that her husband's case is part of a pattern: "The systematic elimination or marginalization of every intellectual and leader in Pakistan who has stood up to the institutionalization of a militarized Islamist state." She explains, "Ever since the military dictator Mohammed Zia ul-Haq created the well-oiled machine of religious extremism, Pakistan's progressive and liberal voices have faced allegations of treason and corruption."

Ms. Ispahani fears that her husband will meet the fate of Punjab's governor Salman Taseer and Pakistan's minister of minorities Affairs Shehbaz Bhatti. A year ago this month, Taseer was murdered by a member of his security detail for protesting Pakistan's blasphemy law and speaking up for Asia Bibi, an impoverished Christian mother of five who, denied her right to due process, has been condemned to death under that law. When the killer was taken into court, he was showered with rose petals by members of the reputedly liberal Pakistani bar association, and otherwise heralded as a hero by many others of his countrymen. A court later convicted the governor's assassin, but in reprisal the judge himself was targeted for death by Muslim fanatics and forced into hiding. A few weeks after Taseer's killing, Bhatti was gunned down outside his family's home for his own considerable efforts to repeal the infamous blasphemy law and his lifelong advocacy of religious tolerance.

Both Bhatti and Taseer were Haqqani's personal friends. They shared a vision of Pakistan as a religiously and culturally tolerant and pluralistic society. Last spring at the embassy in Washington, Haqqani, in an act of undeniable courage given the trend at home, held a memorial service for Bhatti, a Christian. At it, he implored, "It is time for us to stand up, courageously against intolerance, against discrimination and against extremism."

Before his ambassadorship, Haqqani was my colleague at the Hudson Institute. When, after the 9/11 terror attacks, some would ask "where are the moderates," he was among the first I would point to. With a background in traditional Islamic education, as well as in modern studies, he worked assiduously as a scholar and writer to expose the "well-oiled machine" of Islamic extremism referenced by his wife in her op-ed. As the co-editor of Hudson's *Current Trends in Islamic Ideology*, he provided cogent analysis of extremist groups and their supporters, including those here in the United States. His articles — "Weeding Out the Heretics": Sectarianism in Pakistan," "The Politicization of American Islam," "India's Islamist Groups," "The Ideologies of South Asian Jihadi Groups," and "Afghanistan's Islamist Groups" — deserve careful reading today.

In Haqqani's eulogy for the slain cabinet minister on minorities last year, he forewarned:

Those who would murder a Salman Taseer or a Shahbaz Bhatti deface my religion, my Prophet, my Quran and my Allah. Yet, there is an overpowering, uncomfortable and unconscionable silence from the great majority of Pakistanis who respect the law, respect the Holy Book, and respect other religions. This silence endangers the future of my nation, and to the extent the silence empowers extremists, it endangers the future of peace and the future of the civilized world.

This silence now endangers Haqqani himself. There are a number of sensitive security issues on the United State's priority diplomatic agenda with Pakistan. As extremism threatens to engulf that country, one of them must be saving Husain Haqqani, a true believer in religious pluralism and tolerance.

— *Nina Shea is the director of the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom and co-author, with Paul Marshall, of Silenced: How Apostasy & Blasphemy Codes Are Choking Freedom Worldwide (Oxford University Press, 2011).*

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